

Sub A' } The claimed subject matter includes:

1. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit, comprising:

a disk drive including a disk storage medium for storing audio information;

5 a solid state electronic memory for use in active playback and recording, wherein audio information is transferred from the disk drive to the memory and then the disk drive is placed in a locked state; and

electronic circuitry operatively coupled to the disk drive and memory for playback of the audio information from the memory.

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2. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1 and further comprising a shock absorbing material protecting the disk drive.

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3. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the electronic circuitry includes a digital signal processor (DSP), a digital-to-analog converter, and an amplifier, which together retrieve and play audio information from the solid state memory.

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4. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the solid state memory comprises a flash memory device.

5. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the solid state memory comprises a dynamic random access memory (DRAM) device.

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6. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the solid state memory comprises a static random access memory (SRAM) device.

7. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1 and further comprising means for transferring information to and from a computer.

5 8. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1 and further comprising a display and an input device for interfacing with a user.

9. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 3 and further comprising a microprocessor operatively coupled to the DSP and the display and input device.

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10. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 9, wherein the DSP is programmed to perform a plurality of functions, including communication with a computer, reading and writing data from and to the memory and disk drive, compressing and de-compressing audio data, and communicating with a microprocessor.

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11. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 9, wherein the microprocessor is programmed to interpret key depressions from a user, and to provide visual feedback and prompts on the display.

20 12. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 9, wherein the microprocessor includes a clock function, by which messages and prompts keyed to date and/or time are activated without burdening the DSP.

25 13. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the disk drive is a hard drive.

14. A portable, hand-held audio playback unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the disk drive is removable from the playback unit.

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